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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, January 26, 1938.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Notes for Food-Shoppers." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and the Consumers' Counsel, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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For the listener who does the family marketing, here are the semi-monthly notes on price and supply trends in seasonal foods.

First, about the prices that are going down. The predictions are that eggs, butter and beef will be going down seasonally this month--- eggs, butter, and beef. Then, about the prices that will be going up. Advances are in prospect for cabbage and sweetpotatoes. Finally, about the prices that will probably stay "as in." Potato and apple prices probably will show little change from present relatively low levels.

Vegetable prices generally advance during winter months. String-bean prices hit their peak in January and then move down through July. The high point in spinach and carrot prices comes in February and the low points in June and August. Onion and cabbage prices go up steadily until May, while the highest celery and potato prices come in June. Prices of these 4 vegetables then start moving down until they hit bottom in October and November.

Here's news about oranges. Retail orange prices usually hit their low point during January and February. Current supplies are the largest on record. Best-quality oranges are firm and heavy and have a fine-textured skin. But puffy oranges are likely to be light in weight and lacking in juice. Surface blemishes such as scars, scratches and slight discolorations do not affect quality.

Artichoke supplies increase during the early months of the year with peak shipments in March and April. When you go to buy artichokes, here's a tip -- the most desirable are compact and heavy, yield but slightly to pressure, and have large tightly clinging, fleshy scales of good green color. Green color indicates freshness, for chokes turn brownish from age or injury. Size does not affect quality or flavor. Open or spreading artichokes with hard scale tips and fuzzy centers generally have a strong flavor and tough or woody scales.

Which brings us to the first strawberry-shortcake news of 1938. The first carlot of strawberry shipments are expected this month. The early berry season is starting later than usual due to freezing weather in December in Florida. Florida is the only source of strawberry supply until March, and production in this area is about a tenth less than a year ago, but about average.

The heaviest Florida shipments come in early March and the peak movement from all areas in May. Quality berries are solid, free from moisture and have their green cap attached. Size is no indication of flavor in strawberries. Flavor depends rather on variety. Overripe berries always have a dull color and are wet and leaky. Of course, you know that any careful buyer takes a look at the berries in the bottom of the basket before laying down her money.

Spinach and cabbage from the 1938 crop are now moving to market and you will probably see more and more of these 2 vegetables for sale during this month and next. About a fourth of commercial cabbage production and slightly over half of annual commercial spinach supplies come from the early-producing States which ship from December through April. Texas is the major State in the group. Production of early spinach is slightly smaller than a year ago but the early cabbage crop is about the same. When you go to buy spinach, remember that the best quality has fresh, crisp, clean leaves of good green color. As for cabbage, early cabbage is not so solid or firm as cabbage from the late crop, but, even so, the better heads are reasonably firm and heavy for their size. Both "old" and "new" cabbage are now on the market. You can tell the new cabbage by its deep green leaves and rather loose heads. Freshness of appearance is a more important indication of quality in early cabbage than in the late varieties.

Another member of the cabbage family will be coming to market more and more until March. This is broccoli. Broccoli shipments are heaviest in March but supplies usually are large during the first third of the year. Tenderness is an important quality factor in broccoli because the whole stalk -- flower, leaf, and stem is used. The best broccoli is either dark green or purplish green, depending on the variety. Overmature broccoli which is tough or stringy will have its flower-clusters open enough to show the full yellow or purple color of the blossom.

So much for the fresh fruits and vegetables. Now here is a note about bread. In spite of the fact that the ingredients of bread have gone down in price since last June, the average retail white bread prices for the United States have remained unchanged. During the last part of 1937, the gross margin or the spread between retail bread prices and the cost of the ingredients in a typical pound loaf of bread was at its highest level in 7 years.

As for butter, butter prices will probably go down more than seasonally from now until June. And prices will average less than a year ago.

Finally, a note about meat. The decline in the price of better-grade beef cattle during the first half of this year may be smaller than expected because of the sharp price readjustment in November and December. Retail prices now are considerably below what they were in the fall -- the peak time, but they will continue going down during the first half of the year.

That concludes the notes for food-shoppers for today. More in a couple of weeks.

